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CALFED unveils options for Bay-Delta fix

The ongoing effort to combine Californian's desires for long-term water supply certainty with environmental restoration efforts has reached another milestone with the release of three alternatives to "fix" the Bay-Delta, the largest and most complex estuary on the West Coast. The preferred alternative will be selected late summer of this year after a round of statewide public hearings and workshops has been completed.

The public has until June 1 to comment on the draft Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement and Report, major milestones in the selection later this year of a final long-term plan for restoring the ecological health and improving the management of water in the Bay-Delta System for the benefit of farms, fish and wildlife, and city use. The Bay-Delta is an intricate web of waterways created at the junction of the San Francisco Bay and the Sacramento and San Joaquin rivers, and the watershed that feeds them. It supplies drinking water for more than 22 million Californians, is a source of irrigation for California's \$24 billion farm industry, and is home to the largest estuary on the west coasts of North and South America, containing plants and animals found nowhere else on the planet.

CALFED, a federal-state partnership, has been developing a long-term plan for fixing the Bay-Delta in cooperation with environmental, urban, and agricultural interests. After extensive public and technical review, CALFED has identified three potential alternative solutions, each of which comprehensively addresses the four main problems with the Bay-Delta system: ecosystem degradation, water supply reliability, water quality and levee system integrity.

The main difference among the alternatives is how each would move and store water within the Bay-Delta system.

An orientation session on the draft documents will be held in Sacramento on April 3 and will kick off a series of 12 public hearings throughout the state to receive com-

ments on the draft programmatic EIS/EIR.

The draft environmental document just released represents three years of effort that commenced after the signing of the Bay-Delta Accord on December 15, 1994, which was intended to provide a reprieve from ongoing disputes over water issues for a period of three years. The Accord was recently extended for an additional year in order to provide CALFED and stakeholders the additional time needed to complete the draft and undergo environmental review.

The public provided ideas and comments that guided the development of the draft alternatives throughout the process. The draft evaluates systemwide impacts of the CALFED-Bay Delta Program on a range of issues including water supplies, fishery resources, vegetation and wildlife, agricultural economics and land use, recreation, and regional social and economic factors.

Selection of the preferred alternative is scheduled for the summer, after all public input has been obtained. Certification of the final EIS/EIR is expected to occur in late 1998.

The orientation and hearings are as follows: Orientation Session - April 3 in Sacramento at the Sacramento Convention Center, from 9:00 a.m. to noon. Public Hearings (all beginning at 7 p.m.) include April 23 at the Oakland Masonic Center, 3903 Broadway; May 6 at the Jean Harvie Center, 14273 River Road, Walnut Grove; May 7 at the Chico Community Center, 545 Vallombrosa Avenue; and May 14 at The Doubletree, 1830 Hilltop Drive, Redding.

The complete draft programmatic EIS/EIR is available in hard copy. The Phase II Interim Report, and Executive Summary may also be accessed on the CALFED Bay-Delta Program's Internet site at: <http://calfed.ca.gov>, or requested in hard copy. To order material, call CALFED toll-free at (800) 900-3587. Written comments on the draft should be addressed to Rick Breitenbach, CALFED Bay-Delta Program, 1416 9th Street, Suite 1155, Sacramento, CA 95814.